

Brookline Neighborhood Conservation District Commission
MINUTES OF THE APRIL 25, 2016 MEETING
Library (2nd Floor), Health Center, 333 Washington Street

Commissioners Present:

Mark Allen

Dennis DeWitt

Dick Garver

David King

Stephen Chiumenti

Deborah Goldberg

Staff: Marissa Barrett, Meghan Hanrahan Richard, Ashley Clark

Members of the Public: See list.

Commissioners Absent:

Robin Koocher

Paul Bell

Mr. Garver called the meeting to order at 7:10pm.

1. Approval of minutes

The commission had no comments regarding the minutes submitted for approval.

Mr. De Witt moved to adopt the minutes from February, Mr. King seconded and the commission voted unanimously to adopt the minutes.

5-0 vote

Public Hearing- Greater Toxteth Neighborhood Conservation District

2. 204 Aspinwall Street (Greater Toxteth NCD)- Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to construct a 2 ½ story, approximately 537 square foot garage and master bedroom addition to the rear of the house. The addition will consist of 1047 square feet of habitable space (Nina Lin and Rane Berovkhim, owner; Lee Silverstone, applicant).

Mr. Garver asked staff to present their report. The staff briefly presented the case, then invited the applicant to present their slides.

Ms. Lin, the applicant, began her presentation with a biographical history of when and how her family moved to Brookline. She then enumerated the repairs they have completed on the house to date since they purchased it. Ms. Lin then described why they want to make the proposed changes to the garage and how it will improve the lives of her family.

Ms. Leigh, the architect for the project, presented the technical details of the proposal and described the iterative process they went through to arrive at the current design. Their goal was

to maximize the green space and maintain the use of the driveway for the applicant's automobiles.

Mr. Chiumenti had a question regarding the size of the new garage compared to the one they plan to demolish.

Ms. Leigh confirmed they are similar in size. The new structure will connect to the existing house by a glass piece. The intention behind the glass connector is to maintain the appearance of two separate structures.

Ms. Leigh continued her presentation and showed the commission several elevation plans as well as rendered images of the design. She again reiterated the main goal is to create the appearance of two separate buildings.

Mr. Chiumenti asked about the new living space being added.

Ms. Leigh explained, as represented in section A1.1, the glass breezeway receives the new structure and attaches to the new garage. The second floor of the garage will be living space.

Mr. Chiumenti commented on the large size of the roof over the breezeway.

Mr. Garver asked the architect to explain the rationale for the angling of the garage. He informed the architect of the NCD guidelines which state the commission needs to take into consideration the views from the public way, and this pivot introduces a facade with a large garage door. Further, Mr. Garver noted the public will see this garage from the street.

Ms. Leigh answered Mr. Garver's question by explaining the role the view from the kitchen had in their design approach. For the applicant, it was important for the structure to be situated in a way to keep a line of sight through the yard to to maintain a visual over the children.

Mr. De Witt asked several questions regarding the design decisions and its functionality, especially regarding the steps. Mr. De Witt expressed a concern over the maneuverability of a car or snowplow.

There was further discussion between the architect and commission regarding the angle for the garage.

Mr. Garver expressed a concern over the design giving up parking functionality and imposing the garage door onto the street.

Mr. Garver asked for public comment. There were several neighbors present to add a public comment regarding the 204 Aspinwall project under review.

A resident at 61 Toxteth asked if there are any other glass breezeways in the neighborhood.

A resident at 20 Harrison commented on the homeowner's luck in purchasing the house and that it is a shame the Toxteth Neighborhood is losing a historic barn. Further, the resident spoke to their understanding and appreciation they are building less than they are allowed at 204 Aspinwall.

Ms. Turner, a Toxteth resident, applauded the other comments and thanked the applicant for their previous improvements. She does not feel the project is outside of the NCD guidelines and appreciated the green space and creative use of the property.

Mr. Garver opened the discussion to commissioners.

Mr. King commented that the project is awkward in relation to other buildings in the neighborhood. He further remarked that it does not seem there are any other buildings with an addition like the one proposed. He further stated it will be very unusual and very different for the neighborhood.

Mr. King discussed that there are some very good examples of projects that connect two buildings with a similar breeze, citing the Ronald McDonald house but the geometry on this project is odd for the Toxteth neighborhood. Further, the house has quirky bays sticking out in different places and in this design iteration everything is symmetrical.

Mr. King compared the design to a villa rotunda, and further described the house as stuck on with a connector. He concluded his remarks by saying the project is urbanistically out context in the neighborhood and very awkward.

Mr. Allen commented that the bays in the front are rotated, and in context with the garage doors addition, which is also rotated. Mr. Allen liked that they are not rotated to face the street and partially rotated at an angle 80/85 feet back from the sidewalk. He further commented that another advantage with rotation is that allows for more green space in the back, which seems preferable.

Mr. Allen liked the glass breeze way, stating there is this historic house and this breezeway is a connector to something that is sympathetic to the architecture of the house but not historical. It is on this point that Mr. Allen feels rotation is acceptable. Mr. Allen concluded his thoughts by sharing he feels it is very satisfactory as the project is sympathetic on a number of levels. Further, he appreciated that the clients included a 3-D view as it is helpful to look at.

Mr. Chimenti commented that he did not appreciate that the base is rotated, but stated if anything about the design of the project is novel it is subtle and in the back. Therefore, the changes proposed would not be terribly visible from the street. The dilapidated barn strikes better in every respect with what is represented in the new design.

Mr. Chimenti further cited the public support of the project alleviated their main concern over the view scape and felt it signified the neighbors viewed it as an improvement from their perspective as well.

Ms. Goldberg agreed with Mr. Allen. She thinks the design contributes positively to neighborhood's townscape. It still recognizes in almost total the physical record of time and place. She further noted the angle is preferable than being pitched towards the street. Ms. Goldberg felt the materials are not incongruous with the neighborhood, highlighting the commission's mission is different than a local historical district and this is a good attempt at working with the neighbors.

Mr. De Witt agreed with Mr. Allen and liked the idea of the glass breeze way. He felt in this context, it is consistent with the existing guidelines. However, Mr. De Witt expressed concern over the garage working the way the architect has described, specifically, if they will be able to maneuver their vehicles in and out fluidly. Further, Mr. De Witt expressed a need for a clear understanding of the square footage calculation and particularly need to understand to which extent there is a variation.

There was a discussion by the commission over whether or not the assessor has accounted for the 3rd floor in their square footage total.

Mr. De Witt noted as part of the completed documents there should be a certified calculation. The commission discussed with the applicant and staff that there is a certified calculation. There was further discussion of the attic and if it was included in the square footage or not.

Mr. Garver agreed with the trend of the comments. The project is an enhancement to the neighborhood. Mr. Garver feels the breeze way is an interesting way to transition, though commented it is about making the very good perfect. It is a great project overall.

Returning to a discussion over the square footage calculations, the commission discussed confirming there is a certification before approving the project by a vote. The staff informed the commission they can make a motion with a condition to confirm the square footage.

Mr. Chiumenti moved to accept plan as presented on the condition that the square footage is accurate and on the record Ms. Goldberg seconded and the commission voted:

5-1 vote

5 for and 1 opposed (Mr. King opposed)

3. Discussion on General Guidelines

The commission informed the members of the public they are still looking for members for the NCDC.

Mr. De Witt began a discussion on the NCDC's general guidelines, and shared the goal for the evening was to have a final look at the draft of the general guidelines.

The staff informed the commission they will meet with Mr. Bennett from the Building Department on Wednesday to discuss the drafted guidelines.

In regards to edits for the guidelines, Mr. De Witt brought up page six. He noted it needed a very minor change to the existing wording. The edits do not change the substance but attempt to be more accurate. Mr. De Witt suggested waiting until staff has consulting with Mr. Bennett.

The commission discussed they may, in addition to design guidelines as adopted as part of the by law, refine and clarify how the guidelines are applied. To illustrate, Mr. De Witt, described a situation in which there is a neighborhood with a particular interest and concern over preserving the streetscapes. The commission may then adopt a design review standard that specifically addresses front yard fences. The commission could then stipulate front yard fences may not be higher than 42 inches tall. This is to demonstrate the role the commission may play in adopting standards which amplify, define or clarify design guidelines.

Mr. Garver asked the commission members if there were any problems with this concept. There were no further comments added. Mr. Garver said as a commission they will await for the formal opinion from Mr. Bennett from the Building Department.

4. Greater Toxteth Design Review Standards

Mr. Garver addressed the public in attendance and reviewed the process of writing the design review standards. Mr. De Witt discussed why it is important to include standards that give some aesthetic guidance.

A Toxteth resident shared that they tried to create a LHD but the neighborhood did not want one. Further, from the beginning the neighborhood has been clear they did not want a stringent design review. She does not feel the proposed design review guidelines are in the spirit of what the neighborhood wants from an NCD.

The commission discussed with the public the approval process for the guidelines and further clarified it was not the commission's intention to approve the guidelines this evening. Their goal over the past few months was to work out a document that the commission could bring to the public to have a discussion over.

A resident, Ms. Turner, felt there were many valuable considerations. Ms. Turner spoke to a distinction between restrictions and suggestions. She feels there should be recommendations and best practice guidelines, but confident there would not be support from a heavier hand.

There was a discussion over how the guidelines move from the commission to solicit feedback from the public, and how that feedback is integrated before approval and use.

There was an extensive discussion between the commissioners and the residents of Toxteth over the pros and cons of having design guidelines and the benefits and downfalls of having more imposing rules versus less stringent rules.

5. New Business/Updates

There was no new business or updates.

Mr. Garver motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 pm.